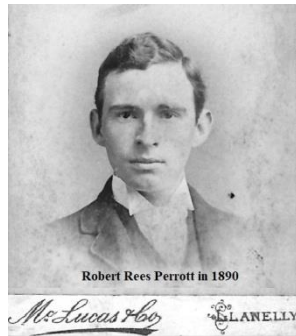


ROBERT REES PERROTT 1866-1938



The Founding Father of the Port Elizabeth Perrotts.

The life of Robert Rees Perrott is perhaps typical of the time when many young men were attracted to the colonies because of the opportunities that existed in certain of those territories. In the Cape Colony from the 1870's onwards, such opportunities presented themselves to young railwaymen. The expansion of the railways gained momentum following the discovery of diamonds and the development of the Kimberly diamond fields.

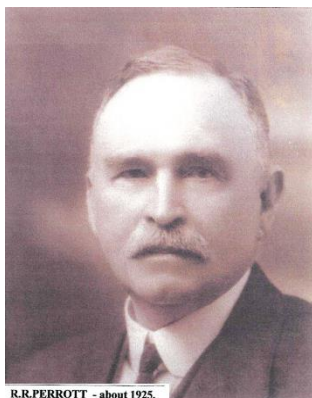
In 1872 the Cape Government Railways (CGR) was established with the object of linking the ports of Port Elizabeth and Cape Town to the diamond fields and then extending the line northwards to serve the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Unable to staff these expanding operations locally with suitably trained personnel, the CGR found it necessary to recruit from overseas. The CGR required not only experienced managers, but also operating staff and clerks. The obvious source of such manpower lay within the British railway companies such as the Great Western and North British Railways. Thus in 1889 R.R.Perrott, then a 23 year old clerk employed by the GWR in Llanelli, Wales, was recruited by the Cape Government Railways for work at the harbour in Port Elizabeth.

Robert Rees Perrott had been born in Llanelli on the 20th day of March 1866. He was the seventh and youngest child of Capt. Walter Perrott and Jane (nee' Rees) of Llanelli. The Perrotts who originally hailed from Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire had been established in Llanelli for some time. RRP's grandfather, George Perrott had been dockmaster there for many years and having married twice had fathered fourteen sons and four daughters. RRP's, father Walter, like many of his brothers had gone to sea at the age of often and received his mate's certificate in 1851.



Capt Walter Perrott (1827-83)

Little is known of RRP's youth but it is possible that he received his education at the national school in Llanelli in the same manner as his future brother-in-law but we have no proof of this. He was however an educated man as witnessed by his fine library at his home and the overseas newspapers and periodicals, from John O' London and the Spectator to the weekly Sketch to which he subscribed and which arrived from England on the weekly mailsteamer.



R.R.PERROTT - about 1925.

Of his early working life we again know very little save that he was employed by the GWR at Llanelli docks, probably as a clerk. In the 19th century the administration and operation of many of the harbours in Britain was performed by railway companies such as the Great Western. In the Cape the position was not quite the same for, although the CGR was responsible for sorting, storing and forwarding cargoes, the administration, operation and development of harbours was vested in a Harbour Board.

The duties of a Harbour Board consisted of managing the port, planning future development and maintaining the assets of the port. The day to day management was vested in executive officers of the Board and their staff. The executive consisted of the Board Secretary, the Shore Superintendent, the Harbour Engineer, the Chief Accountant and the Wharf Master.

The Port Elizabeth harbour in 1890 consisted of an open roadstead with a safe anchorage, vessels' being serviced by lighters which were unloaded at two jetties directly into railway wagons. In 1899 the harbour handled a total of 446 steamers and 133 sailing vessels. It was thus a small but busy port and an ideal off-loading point for material destined for the expanding goldfields in the Transvaal. It was probably not an easy port to manage with vessels exposed to the weather and the extra handling of cargo which the non-docking of vessels necessitated.

As previously noted RRP was recruited in Britain in 1889 by the CGR and sent to Port Elizabeth to work with railway staff serving the harbour. At some time during the early 1890's he was detached from railway work and appointed to the Harbour Board as assistant shore superintendent.

In October 1899 the Anglo Boer War broke out and the harbour at Port Elizabeth became an important entry point for troops, horses, mules and the general supplies of war. In the month of February 1900 we read of 29 steamers anchored in the roadstead and between January and July of the same year a total of 235,000 troops and 33,000 animals had been safely landed.

It was during this period, probably early in 1901, that RRP was promoted to Shore Superintendent. It would appear that it was a position that he handled with efficiency for, upon the cessation of hostilities in May 1902, he was presented with a solid silver tea and coffee service by the Admiralty in London. The engraving upon the silver coffee pot reads as follows:

Presented to Robert Rees Perrott by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in recognition of special services rendered by him as Shore Superintendent at Port Elizabeth in connection with the overseas transport of the South African Field Force 1899-1902.

After the Boer War RRP continued as Shore Superintendent until 1907 when he was promoted to Secretary of the Harbour Board which would equate to the chief executive officer of harbour administration at Port Elizabeth.



Hannah Perrott (nee Nelson)
in c1890 and c1920

At this stage one needs to look back at his private life from the time of his arrival in South Africa. On the 27th February 1893 he married Hannah, daughter of Thomas and Mary Nelson of Llanelli, in St Mary's Collegiate Church, Port Elizabeth. It is probable that RRP and Hannah were engaged before he left Llanelli for South Africa in 1890 but there is no confirmation of this.



The marriage was blessed with only one child, a son, Robert Nelson, who was born on the 5th May 1897 in Port Elizabeth. At that time the Perrotts were living in No 9 Cuyler Crescent in a house overlooking the bay and within walking distance of the Harbour Board offices.

Being Welsh by birth it is not surprising that RRP was active in the Cambrian Society, which was well supported by quite a large Welsh community. In 1904 he was Chairman of the society and remained active in the society and generally supportive of Welsh institutions throughout his life. Also in 1904 he paid his first return visit to Wales and it is possible that it was at this time that he became interested in the history of the Perrott family and in which he showed continued interest during his lifetime. It was however Freemasonry which attracted his attention early on in South Africa and was to remain his abiding interest all his life. He joined the Lodge of Goodwill No 711 soon after his arrival in October 1892. He was obviously a good Mason for by 1901 he was Worshipful Master of the Lodge. He continued as a prominent and popular member throughout his life holding many important offices during this period.

In 1933 he attained the distinguished position of District Grand Master of the Eastern Division of South Africa and on his third home visit in 1934 was presented with an illuminated address by the Llanelli lodges in recognition of this honour. The illuminated address, based upon similar works of the 14th century is displayed in the Lodge of Goodwill in Port Elizabeth, while the casket of Welsh oak in which it was lodged is in the possession of the family.

As District Grand Master he was required to visit many areas of the Eastern Cape and we find evidence of this in the small town of Port Alfred where on September 10th 1936 he laid the foundation stone of St Paul's Anglican Church. Funds for building the church had been donated by the masons probably on the instigation the Rev. C. W. Wallace, the first Rector of the church, who was himself a keen Freemason. The following inscription appears upon the stone:

*A.M.D.G.
Hunc lapidum posuit
Latamorium preases R.R.P.
SeptemberX. MCMXXXVI
C.W.W. A.C
R. Ep.*

(Translated this would read as follows: For the Greater Glory of God. This stone was laid by the head of the Freemasons R.R.Perrott on September 10th 1936.)

To return to his working life, by 1908 with the imminent formation of Union of South Africa it became necessary to reorganise the railway and harbour administration in the country. The separate colonial railway systems were amalgamated into the South African Railways and Harbours (SAR & H). Consequently Harbour Boards with executive powers were disbanded and an administrative structure, reporting to a General Manager of Railways who in turn was responsible to a Minister of Transport, was put in place. At the ports, Harbour Advisory Boards with no executive authority were established. In Port Elizabeth, RRP was appointed to the newly established position of Port Manager once the changes had taken place.

After a successful term of office in that position he was, in 1912 transferred to Durban as acting Divisional Superintendent (System Manager in today's terms) for the Natal region. In 1914 he relocated again, this time as Superintendent of Railways on the Witwatersrand. The latter posting was short lived as, in 1914 the Great War broke out and RRP was required by the Union Defence Force. At the request of the British Government, South Africa was given the task of seizing German South West Africa (now Namibia), considered to be of strategic importance to the German Navy because of its ports and wireless transmission capabilities.



Major R.R.Perrott. Landing of the South African Forces at Luderitz Bay, 1914



To conquer that country, General Botha decided upon a multi-pronged attack from the South and Southeast with further sea landings at Luderitzbucht and Walvis Bay. RRP, with the rank of captain, later temporary Major, in the Railway Regiment, was to be responsible for the sea landings at Port Nolloth for the South forces and at Luderitz, for the central forces. He was further to be responsible for the supply of these forces by rail from the ports. Forces were landed at Port Nolloth on the 31st of August 1914 and at Luderitz on the 18th of September.

Since the whole plan of the capture of South West was based upon advancing across the desert along existing railway lines to Windhoek, it meant keeping those lines operational and relaying track destroyed by retreating Germans.

Remarkable achievements were made in this regard due to the fact that the railway staff and equipment had been mobilized to form Military Railways under the direction of W. Hoy, the General Manager of the South African Railways who was later knighted for his services by the British Government in 1915.

In the same way the successful landings of troops and supplies and the efficient operation of ports was due to the use of experienced harbour staff under RRP. Luderitzbucht was, like Port Elizabeth, an open roadstead and no doubt the experience gained in this type of undertaking during the South African War fifteen years previously was the reason for RRP's selection for the task. In addition new lines lay in the South in order to supply the Southern Forces more effectively. The efficient manner in which the operations were concluded earned him the award of the Distinguished Service Order in 1915. The citation for the award reads as follows:

'Robert Rees Perrott. Railway Regiment. Captain, Temporary Major. Performed his most responsible duties with the utmost efficiency. Controlled the railway transportation arrangements for the Southern Forces and the landing of supplies at Port Nolloth and subsequently rendered excellent services as Director of Railways at Luderitzbucht where he re-arranged the landing work at the Harbour in such a way as to affect considerable economies.'

Whether his actions warranted the award of the DSO or, the efficient operation of the railways during the campaign, warranted a knighthood for his general manager is a matter for conjecture. There is no doubt that there were political motives behind the awards, indeed questions were asked in the South African parliament in regard to the awarding of a number of DSOs to officers who had served in German South West. However, RRP had received recognition for a difficult operation which had been efficiently handled.

The South West campaign ended with the surrender of the German forces on the 8th of July 1915. RRP returned home to Johannesburg at the end of July, was discharged and returned to his railway work. At that stage they were living in Esselen St probably fairly close to the Railway offices. Towards the end of 1915 he was promoted to Divisional Superintendent of the Cape Midland System with headquarters in Port Elizabeth. From 1915, on his return to Port Elizabeth, he lived at No 136 Cape Road and remained there until 1920. From 1920 until 1925 he resided at "Langharne", Homewood Rd. Situated on the seaward side of the road, the home was built in 1894 by the Harbour Board for the resident Harbour Engineer. It was occupied from 1911 until 1920 by Holford Walker, the engineer at the time but in 1920 it became the residence of the Divisional Superintendent and as from 1928, the System Manager, as he then became.

However, in typical railway fashion, RRP was moved temporarily to all the position of Assistant General Manager of Railways in the main centres of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. He also held at this time the positions of chairman of the Railway Conciliation Board and of the Salaries Board. In Port Elizabeth his name is still known and commemorated by the naming of the principal road through the Railway housing estate, Humerail, as Perrott Avenue.

On the 23rd of January 1925, Hannah Perrott died in Port Elizabeth and was buried in the churchyard of St John the Baptist Church, Walmer. Shortly after her death RRP was offered the post of Assistant General Manager of Railways with headquarters in Cape Town, a position he held until his retirement in 1926.

During 1925 RRP purchased a house, 22 first Avenue Walmer, which he named "Hafod". In 1923 his only son Robert who had qualified as a medical doctor at Trinity College, Dublin, returned to Port Elizabeth. In 1925 RRP decided to alter the house to provide single accommodation in the form of a sitting room/study and bedroom for him leaving the rest of the house to his son, wife and family. Thus from his retirement in 1926 until his death, "Hafod" was to be his home which he shared with his son and family.

Immediately following his retirement, RRP travelled to Durban to join the SAR steamship "SS Apolda" for a voyage to Australia via Singapore. The Captain was a fellow Welshman, Capt. Reggie Williams. Before the Second World War the Railways used to run a number of small steamers for the shipping of coal and at times to load Jarrah timber in Banbury, Western Australia, for use as railway sleepers. It would appear from this and other voyages that these vessels took on some tramping work as well.

He returned home at the end of May 1926 after a trip of about 11 weeks. This voyage was followed by another in 1933 in the SAR ship "SS Dahlia" again under the command of Capt Williams. This voyage lasted 17 weeks, the vessel calling at ports in the Indian Ocean, India Dutch East Indies and Australia before returning to Durban.

In his retirement, RRP continued to lead an active life. He was chairman of the local United Building Society board, a member of the Harbour Advisory Board, on the committee of the Public Library and for a time a member of the Licensing Board.

His membership of the Harbour advisory Board must have been of considerable interest to RRP. The port after long delays was finally by 1930 being developed to handle more and larger vessels alongside modern wharfs in the safety of a protected harbour. This had been planned during the time he had been associated with the harbour, although it was now being completed in a reduced configuration. The first new quay was officially opened by Vice-Admiral E.R.G.R Evans on the 28th October 1933. The occasion of the opening is commemorated on a brass plaque at the entrance to the Charl Malan Quay which displays the relevant details concerning the opening and gives the names of the Harbour Advisory Board including that of R R Perrott.

However, during retirement his main interest continued to lie in Freemasonry, in which he now had time to develop his knowledge of the craft and to travel widely over all parts of the Eastern Cape. Finally as has already been noted he was elected DGM of the Eastern Division in 1933.

RRP paid a number of return visits to the UK and we know he visited there in 1904, 1926 and finally in 1934. He was very interested in the genealogy of the Perrott family, specifically the family roots in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. It is thanks to him and his nephew George Lewis, that the present generation has a great deal of family history going back to the late 17th century.

In 1936 RRP was greatly saddened by the death of his only son Robert Nelson Perrott of "Hafod," on the 23rd of July at the young age of only 39. At the time of his death Bobby Perrott, as he was generally known, was in specialist practice as a Radiologist in Port Elizabeth. It was a great shock, as besides being his only son, they had always been very close to one another. In July 1938, RRP had planned another trip to the East, this time in the MV Bossevain of the Royal Inter-Ocean Line and he was to be accompanied on the round voyage by his eldest grandson. Sadly, however, he died on Saturday the 4th of June aged 72 years. His funeral service was held in St Mary's Collegiate Church where he had been a member since his arrival in Port Elizabeth and from where he had been married 45 years previously. He was buried in the churchyard of St John the Baptist, Walmer, next to his wife and son.

As his obituary in the local paper stated:

"The memory of his name will live for years and his public works will be a fitting memorial to him".

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J. R .PERROTT

Port Elizabeth 2001

ILLUMINATED ADDRESS PRESENTED TO R.R. PERROTT BY THE LLANELLY LODGES IN 1934 AND NOW
DISPLAYED IN THE LODGE OF GOODWILL NO. 711 PORT ELIZABETH.

To Right Worshipful Brother Robert Rees Perrott DSO PAD (Eng)

This visit to your native land affords the masters , wardens and brethren of the three masonic lodges in the town where you derived birth and infant nurture the welcome opportunity not only to accord you fraternal greetings and good wishes, but of extending the heartiest congratulations on the signal honours conferred upon you by the Most Worshipful Good Master of the Grand Lodge of England, who in recognition of distinguished service and requisite Masonic knowledge, has appointed you the Right Worshipful Grand Master of the South African Eastern Division.

They desire to place on record their sense of pride and gratification that a loyal son of Llanelly has attained such high Masonic rank and has been deemed worthy to undertake the duties and responsibilities related thereto. They entertain the confident hope that in the years to come, the Great Architect of the Universe will grant you health and strength to discharge the duties of your important office with satisfaction to yourself and advantage to the craft.

Signed on behalf of;

Prince of Wales Lodge No.671 Saint Elli Lodge No.3942
D.Morris WM J.R.Davies WM
J Harry Thomas SW R.Maske Robert SW
Martin L. Edwards JW D.Williams JW
Saint Cellio Lodge No.4755C.Wintour Waite WM
Stephen S. James SW
Fred Chidjoy JW.

ROBERT REES PERROTT - LINEAGE

Walter Perrott.
b. circa 1685
d. 1752

m i Elizabeth
m ii Anne
b.
d.1757

James Perrott
b.d. 1715

m. Elizabeth Beynon.
bap. Laugharne 27-10-1720
bur. " 31-09-1801

Walter Perrott
bap.27-10-1744 Laugharne
d. 05-07-1833

m. Elizabeth Hitchings
London 1777.
b.02-02-1755 Bosherton.
d. 29-10-1780 Laugharne

George Hitchings Perrott
b.10-12-1778 Bosherton
d. 6-10-1858 Llanelli
bur.StPauls Llanelli

m I Martha Davies. Llanelli
b.
m ii Harriet Williams of
Llanrhydian,Gower
b. 09-08-1790 Llanelli.
d. 07-06-1869 Llanelli.

Capt Walter Perrott
b. 09-10-1827 Llanelli
d. 21-06-1883
bur. St Pauls Llanelli

m.JaneRees
Llanelli 05-05-1850
b. 28-04-1826
d. 11-12-1868

Robert Rees Perrott
b. 20-03-1866 Llanelli
d. 03-06-1938
bur. St John's Walmer SA

m. Hannah Nelson
Port Elizabeth 27/02/1893
b. 1860 Llanelli
d.23/01/1925PortElizabeth

Robert Nelson Perrott
b.05-05-1897 Port Elizabeth
d.23-07-1936 "
bur.StJohns Walmer.

m. DorothyTagert Fennell
b.Castlebar(Ire)28/4/1899
d.29/4/1942PortElizabeth
Bur StJohn's Walmer

ROBERT NELSON PERROTT MA MB BCh (Dublin) DMRE (Cantab)

1897 - 1936.

Robert Nelson Perrott was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa probably at No.9 Cuyler Crescent on the 5th May 1897. He was the son of Robert Rees Perrott and Hannah (nee Nelson).

He was educated at the Grey Institute on the Donkin Reserve, Port Elizabeth under the Headmastership of Dr Way. He matriculated from the Grey in 1913. During his time at school he held the Walsh Masonic Scholarship from 1908 to 1912.

On completion of his matriculation examinations in 1913 he was entered for Rhodes University College in Grahamstown. He started studies at Rhodes in February 1914 following First Medical Courses and Science, subjects necessary for admission to a Medical Faculty at a British university. At that time there was no medical school at any of the South African universities. RNP was at Rhodes During 1914 and 1915 but his whereabouts in 1916 is not clear but we do know that he was not involved seriously with the army or medical corps at that time as recorded in his obituary.

During 1917 he set off for Britain and during that year enrolled at the University of Dublin Trinity College in the Faculty of Medicine. He was associated with the Patrick Dunn Hospital in Dublin from November 1918 and completed his BA degree in 1920 and his houseman year in 1922. He was registered as a medical practitioner in Ireland in July of that year and in December of the same year was registered as a medical doctor in South Africa. His qualifications from Trinity College were MA, MB, Bch, BAO.

He returned to South Africa in 1922 and early in March of the next year was appointed assistant house surgeon at the Provincial Hospital, Port Elizabeth. In June 1924 he was appointed house surgeon. In June 1925 he resigned from the Provincial Hospital and set up in private practice in Port Elizabeth.

RNP married Dorothy Tagert Fennell, daughter of William and Louisa Tagert of Castlebar, County Mayo, Ireland on September 13th 1923 in St Mary's Collegiate Church, Port Elizabeth. Dorothy Tagert adopted the name Fennell being the surname of her great aunt and foster mother. Her father had died prior to her birth and she was adopted by her great aunt. Dorothy Tagert used both the surnames Tagert Fennell or Fennell prior to her marriage.



In 1924 RNP's father had purchased the house "Hafod", 22 First Avenue, Walmer. Alterations were made to the house in 1925 providing separate accommodation for RNP, now a widower, leaving the rest of the house to be shared with his son and family. This was to be RNP's only home and one in which all the family were born:

Robert Peter Carew on the 11th January 1925,
John Rees on the 19th December 1928,
Anne on the 11th November 1931 and
Michael Fennell on the 10th December 1933.

RNP showed great interest in Radiology and after being appointed honorary radiologist at the Provincial Hospital in 1930, he decided to make it his speciality. He proceeded to Cambridge in 1932 for the requisite study and was successful in obtaining his diploma in Medical Radiology and Electrology. He returned to Port Elizabeth and set up a specialist radiology practice with rooms at N01 Trinder Square. He also continued to hold the office of radiologist at both the Provincial Hospital and at St Joseph's Nursing Home.

He had had many outside interests his favourite being radio-telegraphy which he indulged in both at home and in his association with the RNVR. He was one of the pioneers of radio in Port Elizabeth having taken it up as a hobby in the early twenties. At that time he had been elected Chairman of Division Two of the SA Radio League. One's older memories are of radio valves, coils, condensers etc and in his workshop come wireless shack. He was seldom happier than when talking or tapping out to "old man" Ronnie Lambson or "old man" Wally Wilson while, in the evening, it was picking up Daventry on his old valve wireless.

His interest in shipping, the navy and wireless telegraphy led him to join the RNVR. He gained the rank of Surgeon Lieutenant in 1933, qualifying in the light cruiser, HMS Carlisle, during exercises with ships of the South Africa Station. He was also signals officer in the local RNVR and his division won the inter-base trophy for signalling for three consecutive years in South Africa.

He was good with his hands and produced many models of both naval and merchant ships from scraps of wood and by soldering together wire and thin tinplate cleverly producing the desired parts. Sadly only four models survive out of dozens which he made.



Again his love of ships and boats in general led him to Bushmans River where, in 1932/3 he built a small wood and iron cottage as a holiday home on the banks of the river. His naval interests were again satisfied by the use of bunks for beds, sliding doors for small "cabins" or children's bedrooms while, the cottage walls were painted battleship grey!

The inevitable radio was also present, plus batteries and high aerial and on Christmas Day the more loyal of the locals were invited to listen to the King's speech.

On the river were two clinker boats, the "Anne" and an ex lifeboat which could (very occasionally) be sailed, a hydroplane and later a dug-out canoe from the Fiji Islands collected by RRP on his travels. He gained great pleasure from speeding up and down the river in the hydroplane using the then not too common an outboard motor (a Johnson Seahorse of course!).

With his work and with all his other activities he still had time to be an active Mason. He was a member of the Lodge of Goodwill, No 711, having joined the Lodge in 1923. In 1933 he became Master of the Lodge.

As a person he was kind and considerate, a friend to all and possessing a great sense of humour. He was seldom without a joke or an amusing story to tell. He was both popular and well respected by all and this, perhaps, is well illustrated in the attached letter from Jan Potgeiter our gilly at Bushmans written to RNP's widow at the time of his death. While no doubt written by the dominee or the teacher, on behalf of Jan, the sense of loss felt by the coloured community at Klipfontein is clearly portrayed.

John Perrott.

20th August 2001.

Letter from John Potgieter.

Klipfontein,
P.O. Whitney,
ALEXANDRIA.

29th July 1936

Madam,

I beg leave to address these few lines to you. It is with the deepest grief that I hereby beg to offer you and my young masters, my young mistress and the old boss, my deepest sympathy in your loss.

A loss in which I link myself. You Madam has lost a very dear husband and the children a father. But I Madam although I belong to an inferior race, has lost a Master, a friend and a Father. One of those Masters which a man finds only once in a lifetime. So Madam your servant weeps with you and your children. I could not believe that it was true until the Europeans down at Whitney convinced me.

And so Madam, although I cannot realize that my kind and dear Master is no more, yet his work is finished here. When my uncle announced the sad tidings in church on Sunday, when he extolled the good qualities and kind heartedness of my Master to the congregation, how the doctor ministered to his wife when she was ill in bed, free of charge and how kind the doctor was to all the Coloured people. When the congregation rose as a token of their sympathy, Madam, I cried like a baby.

So Madam not only your servant feels the great loss but the church and all the Coloured people of Klipfontein weeps with you. In conclusion Madam may the Almighty give you strength to bear this your great loss and a merciful God bless and comfort you and your children and words fail to express my Grief.

I feel all alone in this world. The last gift and kindness I received last Tuesday a parcel of groceries for which I thank you very much.

I conclude Madam with deepest respect,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN (POTGIETER).